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## States' Nicknames



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Alabama: Heart of Dixie  
Alaska: Last Frontier  
Arizona: Grand Canyon State  
Arkansas: Land of Opportunity State  
California: Golden State  
Colorado: Centennial State  
Connecticut: Nutmeg State  
Delaware: First State  
Florida: Sunshine State  
Georgia: Peach State  
Hawaii: Aloha State  
Idaho: Gem State  
Illinois: Land of Lincoln  
Indiana: Hoosier State  
Iowa: Hawkeye State  
Kansas: Jayhawk State  
Kentucky: Bluegrass State  
Louisiana: Bayou State  
Maine: Pine Tree State  
Maryland: Free State  
Massachusetts: Bay State  
Michigan: Wolverine State  
Minnesota: Gopher State  
Mississippi: Magnolia State  
Missouri: Show Me State  
Montana: Big Sky Country  
Nebraska: Cornhusker State  
Nevada: Silver State  
New Hampshire: Granite State  
New Jersey: Garden State  
New Mexico: Land of Enchantment  
New York: Empire State  
North Carolina: Tar Heel State  
North Dakota: Flickertail State  
Ohio: Buckeye State  
Oklahoma: Sooner State  
Oregon: Beaver State  
Pennsylvania: Keystone State  
Rhode Island: Ocean State  
South Carolina: Palmetto State  
South Dakota: Coyote State  
Tennessee: Volunteer State  
Texas: Lone Star State  
Utah: Beehive State  
Vermont: Green Mountain State  
Virginia: Old Dominion  
Washington: Evergreen State  
West Virginia: Mountain State  
Wisconsin: Badger State  
Wyoming: Cowboy State

# The Origin of States' Nicknames

Each of the 50 American states has a nickname. Most states have more than just one. The nicknames have different backgrounds. Sometimes they refer to the state's location or a natural feature or an animal that is predominant in the area. The nickname may be of a more abstract nature, alluding for example to the impression it can have on a visitor, or a characteristics shared by the state's inhabitants. It is not infrequent for a nickname to refer to a historical event or person. But there are also nicknames of unknown origin.

## Flower, Fruit, Tree, Animal

Many states have taken their nicknames from a species of plant or animal that grows or lives in their territory.

**Georgia** is called the Peach State because peaches are important for its agriculture economy alongside pecans and peanuts. Georgians show their appreciation of peaches by having named a street in Atlanta, Peachtree Street, and an airport in Chamblee, DeKalb-Peachtree Airport.

**Ohio**, called the Buckeye State, also took its nickname after a tree that produces nuts resembling a buck's eye (as well as a chestnut). The state's football team, which plays in Division I-A, proudly bears the name the Ohio State Buckeyes.

The beautiful, even if short-lived, flowers of magnolia trees gave the southern state of **Mississippi** its nickname - the Magnolia State. The Magnolia Independent Film Festival or The Mag, which has been an annual event in Mississippi in February since 1997, was clearly named in connection with the nickname.

A fan-leafed palm tree gave **South Carolina**, the state where it grows, its nickname: the Palmetto State, while a different tree - pine - is associated with **Maine**, the Pine Tree State. The percentage of forested land of Maine is nearly 90% so the nickname seems accurate. White pinecone is also the state flower depicted on its license plates.

Looked at from a distance bluegrass looks bluish, but on closer examination it appears bright green. As it is a common sight on many pastures in **Kentucky**, it is responsible for the state's nickname - the Bluegrass State.

The nickname the Nutmeg State does not mean that the spices grows in the state that bears this nickname, **Connecticut** (also called the Constitution State,) but alludes to an alleged skill of this states' peddlers to make business whenever possible, including selling wooden nutmegs to unsuspecting customers.

Several states derive their nicknames from animals that live on their territory. They include **Oregon**, the Beaver State, **Michigan**, the Wolverine State, **Wisconsin**, the Badger State, **Minnesota**, the Gopher State, **South Dakota**, the Coyote State and **North Dakota**, nicknamed

the Flickertail State after a little squirrel, which is one of the favorites on the coyote menu. The last four states are neighbors located in the central northern United States.

## Historical Reference, Historical Figure

Some of the states' nicknames make reference to a historical event or historical person that played an important role for the state.

**Colorado** became the 38th state of the Union in 1876, a hundred years after the Declaration of Independence, and in reference to this, it was named the Centennial State.

**Delaware** on the other hand, was the first to ratify the Constitution, which is commemorated by its nickname "The First State".

Besides its central location among the first 13 states, its vital role in leading and supporting democratic reforms ensured **Pennsylvania** its nickname the Keystone State. In architecture "keystone" is a central wedge of an arch which holds all the arch pieces together.

**Virginia**, often called the Old Dominion State, is also known as the Mother of Presidents. With 8 U.S. presidents born in its territory (George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, James Monroe, William Henry Harrison, John Tyler, Zachary Taylor and Woodrow Wilson.) Virginia is still in the lead, but the runner-up, the state of Ohio, is close behind with 7 American presidents born within its territory.

**Maryland's** nickname - the Free State - also makes a reference to history. It was given the name by a Baltimore newspaper during the 1920s when it wanted to be free from Prohibition. This state has two other nicknames: the Old Line State and the Chesapeake Bay State.

The nicknames of a couple of states honor great historical figures. **Illinois** is the Land of Lincoln, one of the most memorable American presidents, who led the country through the hard times of the American Civil War, while a great Indian chief Black Hawk, who lived most of his life in Illinois, is remembered in the neighboring state **Iowa** - the Hawkeye State.

## Natural Characteristics

Perhaps the most common reason for choosing the nickname for a state is a natural feature of the landscape or the geography of the state.

**Florida** with its sunny days and picturesque beaches is known as the Sunshine State.

**Alabama's** nickname is related to its central location among the states of the Deep South. As the popular name for the American South is Dixie, the state of Alabama has become the Heart of Dixie.

Big areas of the northwestern state of **Washington** are covered in evergreen trees, and so the state was given the name - the Evergreen State.

Another state that borders with Canada, but lies in eastern United States, **Vermont**, is the Green Mountain State. In a short period of its history when it was a republic (1777-1791), it was called the Vermont Republic, or, less formally, the Green Mountain Republic.

**West Virginia** also derives its nickname from a range of mountains - the Appalachians. It is called the Mountain State.

The greatest tourist attraction of **Arizona**, which lures visitors to the state from all over the world, is the Grand Canyon. Naturally, the nickname of this state is the Grand Canyon State.

The main feature of the northwestern state of **Montana** are its vast plains. Thus, Montana was named Big Sky Country.

The gardens of **New Jersey**, which were once the supplier of vegetables for the big cities of New York and Philadelphia earned it the nickname the Garden State.

Location on the bays is the reason why the 7th smallest American state, **Massachusetts**, is nicknamed the Bay State. **Rhode Island** lies on the Atlantic and its nickname is the Ocean State.

One of the nicknames of **Louisiana** (known also as the Pelican State) is also related to water, or rather hundreds of bayous - slow-moving streams, which are home to alligators. Thus, Louisiana is called the Bayou State.

The location of **Alaska** in the northwest extremity of the American continent and its separation from the rest of the country gave rise to the nickname of this by far the largest of the American states. Alaska is called the Last Frontier.

The beauty of the red sunsets over the Sangre de Cristo Mountains of **New Mexico**, earned this state the nickname: "The Land of Enchantment". Colorful rock formations gave the northeast state of **New Hampshire** the nickname the Granite State.

Natural riches such as gold and silver are behind the nicknames of two states where they were found. **California**, which experienced the largest gold rush in the history of America is known as the Golden State, while neighboring **Nevada** is the Silver State. When the silver was gone, the towns which once flourished became abandoned and today they attract tourists as empty "ghost towns". Even though no diamonds are found in the northwestern state of **Idaho**, it is still called the Gem State. It expresses the idea of its inhabitants that this state is the jewel of the western Rocky Mountains. **Arkansas** is rich in natural resources and that is why its nickname is the Land of Opportunity.

Rather than with precious metals excavated in the above mentioned states, **North Carolina's** nickname the Tar Heel State is associated with a sticky product distilled from pine trees such as tar, pitch and turpentine, and which legend has it sticks to the feet of North Carolina natives causing them to be brave and "stick in a fight".

## The Inhabitants

Characteristics of the inhabitants of some states is the basis for many states' nicknames.

**Missouri's** people had a reputation for being skeptical or incredulous to believe. That's why the state got its nickname the Show Me State. Some settlers who came to **Oklahoma** in the 1880s claimed land earlier or sooner than they were allowed to enter. This unfair way of acquiring land earned the state the nickname the Sooner State. Today, the negative connotation has been lost. The undoubtedly positive nickname, on the other hand - the Volunteer State - was earned for the state by the citizens of **Tennessee** when they volunteered to join Andrew Jackson in defense of New Orleans against the British soldiers in 1812. The industrious nature of Mormons, who worked "as hard as a bee" is behind the nickname of the state of **Utah**, the Beehive State.

**Nebraskans** have been so attached to the university athletic team that they adopted its name as the state's nickname, the Cornhusker State. The nickname the Cowboy State clearly denotes that **Wyoming** was once the state where a lot of cowboys brought their cattle to.

## Other Reasons

Finally, there are states whose nicknames do not fall in the above categories.

**Texas** is the Lone Star State because it has just one star in its flag. **New York** is called the Empire State to stress the state's wealth. **Hawaii** is the Aloha State after the Hawaiian greeting "Aloha". **Kansas** is the Jayhawk State commemorating Jayhawkers who opposed slavery before the Civil War. But the reason why **Indiana** is the Hoosier State is lost in time.